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RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 8584
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ JAN LIMA 4648
RUEHME/AMEMBASSY MEXICO 7513
RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA 9891
RUEHSP/AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN 0192
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO 5302
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 2225
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C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 000418

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FOR WHA/AND, S/CT, AND DS/ATA

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TAGS: [ECIN](#) [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [SNAR](#) [ASEC](#) [CO](#) [MX](#) [PA](#)
BR, TD, CI
SUBJECT: COLOMBIA SEEKING THE LEAD ON REGIONAL
COUNTERTERRORISM/COUNTERNARCOTICS TRAINING

REF: BOGOTA 9065

Classified By: Political Counselor John Creamer -
Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (U) After sharp reductions in kidnapping and homicide rates in Colombia, the GoC is seeking to position itself as a leader in counterterrorism (CT) efforts in the region. Colombia signed a bi-national agreement with Paraguay to provide training and technical assistance in crime scene and kidnapping investigations, financial sector analysis and cyber-investigation, and in combating narco-trafficking and money laundering. A similar agreement with Chile is in the works and talks are also underway with both Mexico and Trinidad and Tobago. Colombia provided training for Brazilian anti-kidnapping police, and Ecuador is looking to send officers to the Sibate Anti-kidnapping Training Center as well. Panama and Costa Rica may also seek closer security cooperation. USG-led initiatives, including the DS Anti-Terrorism Assistance Program (ATA) are providing the GoC with the capacity to become a regional leader in fighting terrorism. End Summary.

Pilot Project with Paraguay

¶2. (C) During an official visit in March 2005, the governments of Colombia and Paraguay signed a bilateral agreement to cooperate in the fight against organized crime, drug trafficking, and armed groups. Through the formation of a bi-national working group, Colombian security services began providing technical and investigative training on kidnapping and extortion to their Paraguayan counterparts using their nearly fifty instructors at the Sibate Anti-Kidnapping Training Center. President Niconor Duarte Frutos asked Colombia for assistance after a string of high profile kidnappings by the FARC-supported Leftist Free Fatherland Party (PPL). Sergio Restrepo of the Anti-Kidnapping office of the Vice Presidency told us cooperative efforts are paying off in Paraguay with a

reduction in kidnappings and recent conviction in the high-profile Cubas murder case. Restrepo said the Colombian Prosecutor General's office worked behind the scenes with Paraguayan investigators and prosecutors on the investigation.

¶3. (U) Vice President Santos, himself a kidnap victim, is personally committed to assisting Paraguay and expanding the program regionally by seeking earmarked funds within the GoC budget. In 2006, Santos twice traveled to Paraguay to lobby the Paraguayan Congress to adopt a law allowing wire tapping in CT investigations. Restrepo and Paraguayan Ambassador Mora said there was concern within the Paraguayan Senate of possible misuse of wire taps. The GOC is paying for Paraguayan law enforcement officials to travel to Colombia to attend courses at the Sibate training center. Restrepo acknowledged it would be difficult to expand the program without more money.

¶4. (U) A similar agreement with Chile is under discussion and is expected to be signed by both countries soon. The agreement focuses on anti-terrorism and counternarcotics.

Talks with Mexico and Trinidad and Tobago

¶5. (U) Mexican President Calderon is also looking to Colombia for assistance in fighting narcotrafficking and organized crime, given increased ties between criminal groups in both countries. Mexican Political Counselor Rafael Ortiz told us Calderon is interested in modeling Mexican laws after those in Colombia to give law enforcement officials greater power in combating narcotrafficking. Calderon also wants to make

constitutional changes which would allow officials to seize the assets of suspected narcotraffickers before conviction and would allow federal authorities to operate more easily within Mexican states.

¶6. (C) Ortiz said Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez's meddling in Mexican and other elections in Latin America, combined with Rafael Correa's recent win in Ecuador, also prompted Calderon's interest in closer security ties to Colombia. He said Mexico's relationship with Colombia has never been more important. Enhanced security cooperation is a good first step in deepening ties.

¶7. (U) Restrepo said Uribe was approached by Trinidad and Tobago with a request for CT assistance, but added that details had yet to be finalized.

Brazil Not Yet Convinced

¶8. (U) Colombia has provided limited training to Brazilian police units but has no plan to work systematically with Brazil on the national level. Federal police from Sao Paulo attended anti-kidnapping courses at Sibate, and Governor Sergio Cabral has also reportedly asked Bogota Mayor Luis Garzon for assistance in combating Rio's increasing crime problems. Still, a Brazilian Embassy official told us President Uribe offered Brazilian President Lula enhanced security cooperation in March 2006, but said there has been no action to date. He said Brazil was reluctant to strengthen bilateral security cooperation, fearing association with Plan Colombia would inflame regional sensitivities.

ECUADOR, PANAMA AND COSTA RICA?

¶9. (U) Although no formal agreement is in the works, the Government of Ecuador requested space for three of its anti-kidnapping unit officers to attend the anti-kidnapping facility in Colombia in 2007. It is unclear whether recent tensions between the two governments following Colombia's

resumption of aerial fumigation along the border will affect future training cooperation. However Panamanian Vice Minister of Government and Justice Severino Mejia (responsible for Panamanian security forces) is scheduled to visit Colombia January 28-February 2 to explore security, counternarcotics, and CT training options with Colombian security officials. Costa Rican security officials--concerned about growing FARC activity--have also reached out to the GOC to discuss closer security cooperation and training.

USG Efforts to Ready Colombia for the Job

¶10. (U) The GOC is eager to become a regional hub for counterterrorism and counternarcotics efforts, particularly in anti-kidnapping and cyber-investigations. Per reftel, Colombia wants to expand the USG-sponsored Presidential Security Program, the Dignitary Protection Initiative, and the Anti-Kidnapping Initiative regionally. The GOC asked for additional USG support via the ATA and other programs to leverage its expertise and increase CT capacity throughout the region. Still, it is unclear whether the GOC can expand the Paraguayan model beyond the current pilot project stage without budgeting Colombian funds for this purpose or receiving additional U.S. assistance.
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